AIDS HEALTH PROMOTION
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EDITORIAL

Nina Ferencic and Faustin Yao

HIV/AIDS education through theatre

In many cultures, the performing arts, including theatre in its various forms, play a very important role in the process of educating successive generations. As an educational tool, theatre is equally important in shaping social values and norms as well as providing a mirror through which a community can observe itself. As such, theatre has a number of features which make it appealing for mass education in general and health promotion in particular.

Theatre is an active and flexible medium which may stimulate individuals in many ways. It can effectively provide the public with information, constantly updating data and adapting messages as needed in successive scenarios and presentations. In that sense, it has an advantage over written and recorded materials.

Like radio, it can offer diversion and stir an audience's imagination. When played live in front of an audience and as part of the community development process, it can solicit people's participation as actors and role models and add to the emotional appeal of messages, thus increasing audience receptivity and understanding. More so than is often the case in formal learning environments, it can be fun and entertaining, thus providing a venue for a relaxed way of learning. In other words, theatre truly holds all the potential of an effective teaching medium and powerful educational tool for behavioural change.

Theatrical productions can help address very difficult issues such as sexuality and yet avoid affronting an audience's sensibilities. For example, if certain words or expressions referring to particular activities are unacceptable to a given audience, play characters can act out those situations and make them perfectly understandable to an audience without speaking. This is very important in developing countries where performances are often held in open access areas, in front of mixed audiences of men and women comprising elders, youth and children. Dialogues among play characters can also address issues very openly, in a manner unusual in everyday conversation.

But theatre can help us go even further. Sensitive issues can also be dealt with actively during the course of a performance. Actors can directly or indirectly solicit audience participation. In the course of an impromptu dialogue with the audience, in what is called participatory theatre, a play character can play a cathartic role. He/she can get audience members to speak about very sensitive topics, using words or expressions which in other circumstances would have been shocking. In the context of the performance, the community can nevertheless accept them without problems and even follow suit.

The cathartic function of theatre and its ability to desensitize issues may well continue after a performance ends. Community members can freely discuss the play's dialogue and characters' behaviours, commenting on the characters' emotions, fears and shortcomings instead of their own. This process may provoke discussions about subjects which are normally difficult to introduce into everyday conversations, even regarding a subject such as AIDS which may be on everybody's mind.

More than any other medium of mass education, theatre offers the advantage of being very flexible. The same storyline can be adapted to many audiences, sites and cultures. Theatre can be effectively used whether the audience is large or small, whether the presentation is in- or outdoors. Different formats can be used to get the message across. For example, the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme (Programme Feature) uses puppets where another theatre troupe might use human characters to convey the same message. Theatre can incorporate all types of information and messages in the play or decor and thus support and enhance the potential impact of an ongoing health promotion campaign in a given community.

Theatre may not always reach large segments of the population, though it often can reach the right segments. Its limited reach can sometimes be ameliorated, however, by incorporating it into other communication channels. For example, a much wider audience than those who come to performances can be reached if shows are audio- or video-taped and widely circulated and/or broadcast. Video, which is a relatively inexpensive technology, can be used not only during a performance itself to create a synergy of effects but can also form part of the educational strategy. Performances and subsequent discussions can be video-taped and played back to other audiences in order to initiate dialogue, deliver a message or share the reactions of similar audiences elsewhere, as in the case of the Burundi Forum Theatre, which uses taped performances as educational materials (Country Watch).

Theatre may further be used as a direct vehicle for social change. In Thailand, a theatre group composed of male and female sex workers visits bars and sex businesses, presenting an entertaining cabaret show on safer sexual practices and promoting condom use among their peers. In Tanzania, theatre troupes using the Theatre for Community Development approach have attempted to involve actors in the village community's life. Typically, before a storyline is developed, a theatre troupe spends some time (up to several weeks) with the community. The actors attempt to get a thorough understanding of the values, norms, life-styles and behaviours of the community. This understanding not only makes it easier for them to develop a culturally acceptable storyline; by involving some community members in the cast, the play also appears more realistic and becomes a better educational and motivational tool.

The theatre for community development approach is potentially a very effective way of promoting health or social change through the initiation of social action. It is a participatory process which brings the theatre troupe and community together in defining problems and suggesting solutions which take local social values into consideration. It is designed to be more than an information channel and more than an educational tool. It is action-driven and therefore more relevant to the emerging focus of AIDS education strategies, which centres on motivation, skills training and the creation of a social climate conducive to change rather than on simple information provision alone.

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Despite the advantages, it should nevertheless be noted that it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect theatre to be the panacea for all problems in AIDS prevention and education. Ultimately, theatre, like other means of communication, cannot work alone. Often, it takes considerable effort and there may be difficulties with organization, funding, resistance on the part of some leaders or sectors of society, obstacles related to policies and law-enforcement practices, difficulties in keeping up the interest of those involved, etc. To achieve change, theatre needs to be complemented by other types of information and education and must be supported by political will, commitment to change, adequate access by audience members to health care and condoms and an overall environment supportive of prevention and care.

This issue of the *Exchange* presents examples of ways in which theatre has been used in various countries to address different issues facing communities. They illustrate different priorities in AIDS education, ranging from simple information provision and awareness-raising to more difficult and complex issues such as discrimination, decision-making about sexual relationships, caring for the sick and changing behavioural and social norms.

If it is true, as Shakespeare's Hamlet told the Players, that theatre's purpose has always been "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature", then we all must remember that the nature or reality reflected in the mirror may sometimes appear further away than it really is. Theatre is one means to bring this reality closer and combat the complacency and denial still seen in many societies regarding AIDS. ■

Nina Ferencic and Faustin Yao, WHO, Global Programme on AIDS, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

PROGRAMME FEATURE

Puppets Against AIDS: breaking through racial and cultural barriers

G. Friedman

"The Xhosa culture prevents local health workers from discussing sexuality in the open. The puppet programme has the license to speak openly in public places, without the stigma, and to reach the masses, without being offensive." A health-care worker in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa thus summarized the appeal of the first long-term project carried out by the African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme (AREPP).

Founded in 1987, AREPP is a non-profit educational trust based in Johannesburg. It provides educational puppet theatre and training workshops in Southern Africa concerning issues related to the environment and mental and physical well-being of communities. AREPP's AIDS project, "Puppets Against AIDS", premiered for World AIDS Day in 1988 and has since gone on the road to various rural and urban regions of South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Tours are planned for Lesotho and Mozambique in 1992.

Joe and Mary

The centre-piece of "Puppets Against AIDS" is a 20-minute puppet play about Joe and Mary. Joe has sexual relationships with different women but doesn't believe in using condoms; he eventually contracts HIV and is shown receiving the

"Puppets Against AIDS" is currently being performed using small hand puppets, which only requires three team members: a puppeteer, a musician and a narrator.

news from a doctor who has tested him for the virus. Joe passes HIV on to his wife, Mary, who in turn transmits it to her baby. Mary and Harry, a friend, are shown caring for Joe while he is dying from AIDS, emphasizing that compassion is necessary and fears of casual contamination unfounded.

Two versions of the play are offered. One features 2-metre tall puppets; due to their size, they can be viewed by large groups at once. The second version uses hand (glove) puppets (sometimes accompanied by one large puppet), operated from a one-man walking booth which can dance and move around among the audience. This makes the show more portable and requires only three performers (a puppeteer, musician/technician and narrator), thus lessening expenses.

The puppets are grey so as to show that AIDS has no preference for skin colour; when people ask which race gets AIDS (a frequent question), they are told "the human race". The puppets do not speak much. Rather, a narrator tells the story and speaks their lines in the local language. Musicians or tapes provide background music. Performances are followed by a condom demonstration (using a life-size bust), question-and-answer sessions and the distribution of free condoms and comic brochures in local languages.

"Puppets Against AIDS" plays a variety of venues, with slight changes in format according to specific situations. The performers enquire beforehand about the characteristics of the community where they will play and about key words which cannot be used. For example, in certain areas of Zimbabwe, they do not use the words "penis" or "vagina" because these terms are offensive in Shona; the term *kutsi* ("down there") is substituted.

When performed in open-air places (parks, squares next to town halls, municipal offices, markets, clinics and post offices, stadiums), the up-coming performance is announced through a megaphone. A large puppet may stroll through

The brochure distributed after performances of "Puppets Against AIDS" features Joe, Mary and their friends, the characters in the puppet play.

AFRICAN RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PUPPETRY PROGRAMME

AIDS TALK,

WITH JOE AND MARY AND FRIENDS.

ENGLISH

AIDS IS....

A killer disease caused by a small germ that can get into anyone's body. The human body has a defence system, which protects it against diseases. AIDS destroys this defence system and leaves our body open to diseases which can then attack and eventually kill us. AIDS is everywhere in the world today and there is no cure yet!

YES! ANYONE CAN GET AIDS.

IT IS NOT TRUE that AIDS only affects homosexuals or the poor. Nor is it true that only drug addicts and prostitutes get AIDS. ANYONE CAN GET AIDS!

WHERE DOES AIDS COME FROM?

Nobody really knows! Don't blame Africa! Don't blame America! We cannot blame groups of people or countries for starting AIDS.

It is not important to know where AIDS comes from, but rather that it is here today. We must find out how we can protect ourselves, our families and our communities against AIDS.

AIDS is everybody's problem!

1

nearby streets in order to attract attention. At school performances, teachers may be asked to leave the room during the question-and-answer session as this can help free pupils of inhibitions in asking questions. Videos are sometimes shown, as in the case of performances at military bases, mining camps and hostels, farms and churches. Parents are often invited to performances as well, as are health-care and social workers.

The times for performances are chosen carefully. For example, evening shows are often planned for labourers' groups, such as farmers and miners, while lunch-time plays are held in city centres and parks.

Joe is treated with compassion by his friend Harry after he contracts HIV in "Puppets Against AIDS".

Workshops

AREPP offers workshops on AIDS, puppetry and drama, both during tours and at its Johannesburg premises. The workshops last from one to five days, covering topics such as basic AIDS education, education skills, script-writing, puppetry techniques and animation exercises. When on tour, one workshop objective is the establishment of local AIDS Task Forces which will continue creating awareness and carry out educational activities in the community. It is AREPP's firm conviction that AIDS should be combated by working through credible community organizations.

Interested parties can also visit AREPP's offices for training. Those staying for a longer period may be paid as temporary staff members while others can learn basic techniques during shorter stays. This was the case, for example, when AIDS educators from Zaire, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Congo, Niger and Gabon visited AREPP in 1990.

Audience response

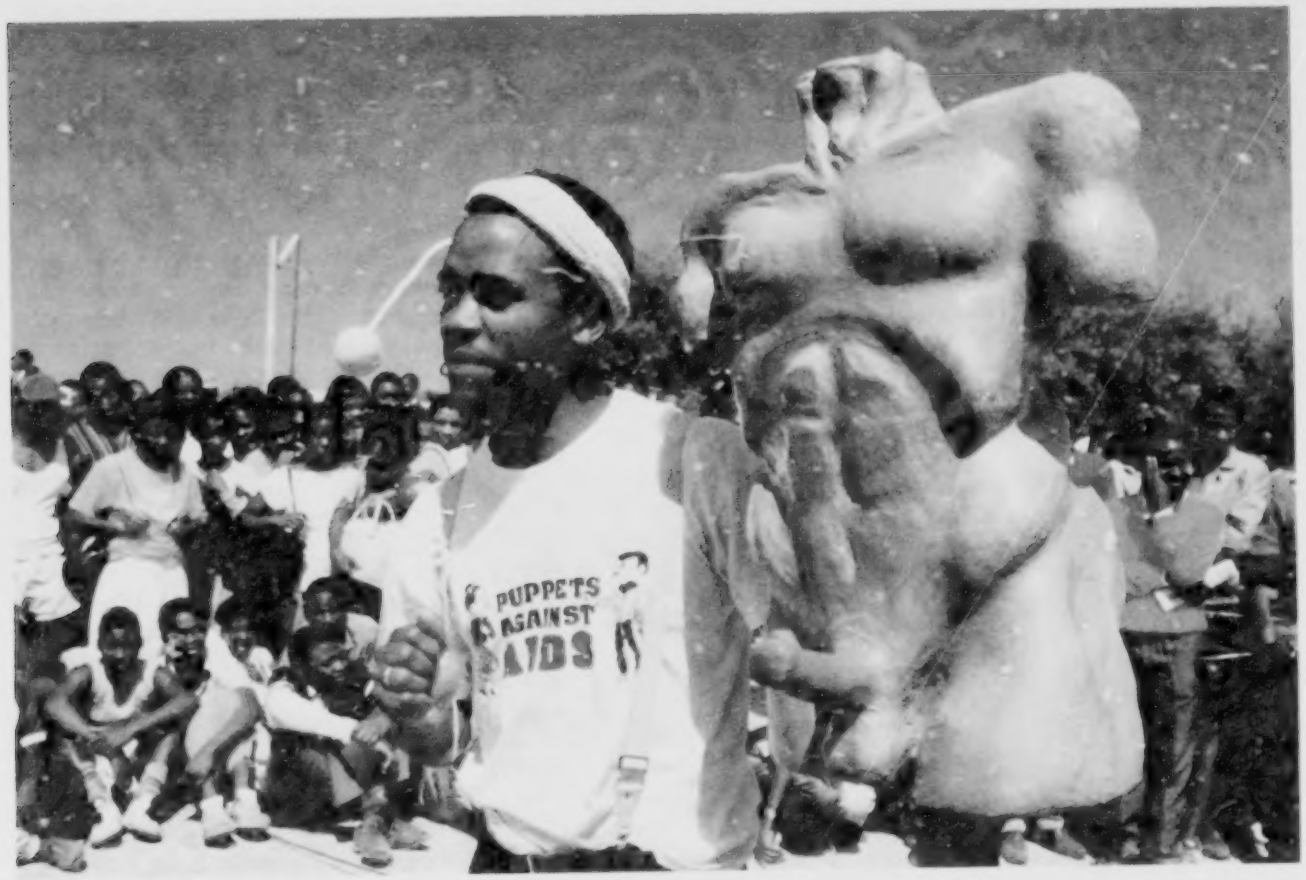
A regular feature of the "Puppets Against AIDS" performances is evaluation of audience response. Audiences are videotaped and often AREPP team members interview people after the show. Concerns relating to AIDS are also related to the team during the question-and-answer sessions, revealing issues which are important to consider in offering health-promotion activities related to AIDS.

In Namibia, for example, miners expressed strong concern about their living circumstances. The fact that they may not bring their families with them to the mines but are also denied leave to visit them regularly means that they rely on local sex workers for satisfaction, making the advice of sticking to one partner hard to follow. Complaints were also made about condom availability; when men must approach female nurses at the local clinic for them, this can be embarrassing. Providing condoms directly at the mining sites was thought to be a possible solution. Concerns were also voiced about members of the military, who pay local women and even schoolgirls for sex.

Other issues brought forward by audience members have included the importance of sex and AIDS education specifically targeting men and youths (in school) and the fact that some people have never even heard of AIDS and condoms at all.

Assessing the effects of the show

In order to improve its approach, AREPP has commissioned an independent organization, the Centre for Epidemiological Research in Southern Africa, to carry out continuing evaluations of its effectiveness. The first evaluation focused on the show's



Condom-use demonstrations using a large torso are an integral feature of the "Puppets Against AIDS" performances.

contents while the second investigated its contribution to increasing knowledge levels.

The results so far indicate that "Puppets Against AIDS" performances are enjoyed by a large majority of the audiences. The aspects liked most are: the theatrical parts (especially the central character Joe), music and dancing; the information on HIV transmission and prevention and the condom demonstrations. (Those not enjoying the show have given as their reason the fact that they do not want to know about AIDS.) No-one has reported to the evaluation team that they found the show morally offensive. Feedback collected by AREPP indicates that the use of humour is important because it puts the messages across in a powerful but light-hearted way.

Evaluations have further shown that the plays have helped spread the message that HIV can be transmitted by people who look healthy and significantly increased knowledge of HIV transmission modes and ways to prevent transmission. Recommendations made by the evaluating team have been followed. For example, the original brochures have been replaced by AREPP pamphlets featuring the puppet characters.

The fact that puppets can cut across racial and cultural barriers is important to AREPP's success. These characters are non-threatening and can say things which live actors cannot. In order to expand the range of this technique, AREPP is currently producing an educational video which will be based on the large-puppet version of "Puppets Against AIDS".

Those wishing more information on "Puppets Against AIDS" tours or workshops are invited to contact AREPP. Tours should preferably be requested at least three months in advance. ■

G. Friedman, Director, AREPP, P.O. Box 51022, Raedene 2124, South Africa, tel. 27-11-485-1164; fax: 27-11-640-2934.

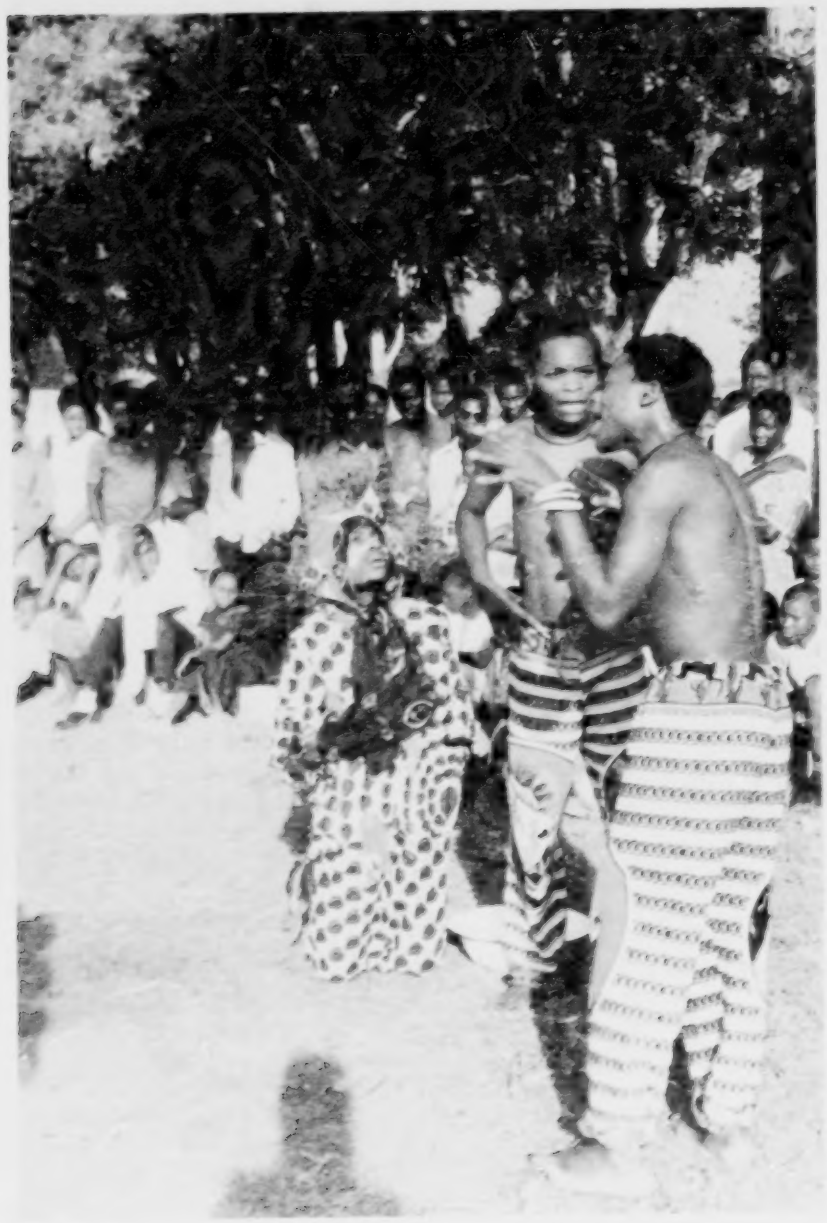
COUNTRY WATCH

This regular column focuses on innovative AIDS health promotion materials and strategies. Brief notes from readers on evaluation results, rapid assessments or pre-testing are also included. Suggestions from readers on items for this column are appreciated.

Zambia

"Tontoloviki", a young man who often drinks but nevertheless has good intentions regarding proper behaviour, is one of the characters developed by the Mwanza Masautso Mobile (Triple MT) Theatre based in Northwestern Province, Zambia. He and other characters from Triple MT's plays have become well-known folk figures during the past five years and figure prominently in the performances which Triple MT puts on in various regions to trigger community discussions about AIDS.

Triple MT's actors explain what bacteria are during one of their health education plays



Triple MT has performed educational pieces on varied subjects for some time (e.g., water well projects) and added AIDS as a theme when they realized that many rural residents were still denying the existence of the disease. Via their "three E" approach – entertainment, enlightenment and education – they use comedy to address three main topics:

- where AIDS originated (many Zambians believe it is a "foreign disease" – and since Triple MT's actors visited Europe people ask them if they are infected! – but the wise elder in the play tries to convince a couple that such discussions are useless);
- that AIDS exists in Zambia (and is not just a form of malaria or another "slimming" disease which people believe traditional healers can cure); and
- that safer behaviour can help prevent AIDS.

Two elements are considered essential in their performances: making the plays relevant to people's daily lives and the use of humour. Before performances, they visit the community and note prevailing circumstances, customs and which people are well-known. They then incorporate such situations and characters into the "bone (skeletal) structure" of scenes which have been prepared beforehand. For example, in discussing multiple partners, they may refer to a privileged chief who has two wives (evoking laughter from villagers who know their chief has four).

The actors have found that an "indirect" approach works best to trigger discussion (which takes place *during* the performances and not only afterwards).

For example, a "doctor" uses a poster in one scene as the basis for a story explaining what bacteria or viruses are (like "insects"). Audience members then ask questions about the story instead of asking direct questions (so that they do not have to admit that they are ignorant about facts). In cases where the play is performed together with a talk by a health educator, the educator asks audience members what they think about various scenes instead of asking them about their own lives. Another indirect approach is the use of songs; the words of well-known regional melodies are adapted to address AIDS.

Triple MT's AIDS play has now been performed about 25 times to audiences including village mothers at a health centre and 600 students at a Catholic girls' schools (followed by spontaneous discussions the next day when the actors asked the school drama group to show their AIDS skits). Their "standard AIDS Song" is sometimes also performed during plays on other subjects.

For more information, contact: Triple MT, Box 25, Kasempa, Zambia.

Burundi

The technique of "forum-theatre" has been used by the AIDS/STD Information, Education and Communication programme of the Bureau d'Etudes et des Programmes de l'Enseignement Secondaire (BEPES) in Burundi to train more than 200 teachers to date. It has two objectives:

- to allow participants to define educational methods and strategies for their students in the area of AIDS/STD and sexual education.
- to stimulate participants to reflect on their own values regarding sexuality so that they can overcome some of their resistance to providing sexual education.

Forum-theatre is an exercise in the form of a play which contains certain "errors". The errors represent obstacles to providing good education and are analysed during the course of the exercise. For example, the play used by BEPES focuses on a teacher who assigns his students an essay on changes they have noted in their community due to AIDS. The "errors" which the play contains are threefold: 1) the teacher reprimands a female student who comes to him for information about condom use; 2) he avoids answering questions about sexuality and 3) he treats his male and female students differently.

After the play is performed, the facilitator asks the audience if they approve of the teacher's behaviour. They are encouraged to suggest solutions to the errors while the actors attempt to defend the teacher's behaviour and ideology. The purpose of introducing the conflict between the actors and the participants suggesting changes is to show that it is not always easy to transform reality and effect change in life-styles. Because the actors resist changing the play, the audience members are encouraged to put forward their solutions more strongly, even acting out the changes themselves in new scenes. This allows the training session to go beyond the mere scope of debate and to actively involve the participants in the dramatic presentation.

The results of the workshops using the forum-theatre approach have been very good: animated exchanges of views, positive changes in knowledge and attitudes vis-à-vis education on sexuality and AIDS/STDs and resolve by the participants to contribute towards changing their world. A video of the process has also been shown to about 40,000 students in 85 schools in order to obtain their views on the issues presented and the type of education they would like.

For more information or a copy of the video, contact: Thomas Munyuzangabo, BEPES, Boite Postale 2990, Bujumbura, Burundi.

Chile

Inspired by the storyline used in the video *Karate Kids* (produced by Street Kids International), the NGO CEPSS has decided to incorporate the use of a video-drama into their own educational activities targeting street-girls in the city of Concepción and surrounding areas. The guiding principle is that the girls themselves participate as actresses playing roles based on their own lives.

Work began with group discussions involving girls living at a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Home. Two psychologists helped them talk about their problems and experiences, which were often very

traumatic, including sexual abuse by adults. After helping them deal with these events, 18 girls were chosen for the final cast. With further assistance from two audiovisual communicators, they were taught expressive techniques and participated in exercises and games to heighten their confidence and familiarize them with the filming process (learning dialogues and facing cameras and lights).

A script was subsequently prepared which features the street-girls' daily-life circumstances, information on how they can engage in AIDS prevention and how they can educate each other via dialogue. The next step will be to film the drama when funds become available.

In another approach, CEPSS invites participants in their community AIDS workshops to act out scenes concerning specific AIDS-related questions such as: why is AIDS a social disease? How does social rejection affect patients? What is the community's role in dealing with people with HIV/AIDS? The "actors" are supported by CEPSS team in their acting efforts so they can overcome possible feelings of embarrassment. Care is also taken during the subsequent discussions to ensure that the actors are not criticized on their performances and that attention is focused on issues important to the entire audience. Such dramatic sessions are then complemented with other participatory activities such as small-group discussions and games. *For more information contact CEPSS, Casilla 3440, Concepción, Chile; tel. 56-41-233-298.*

Thailand

The eastern province of SiSaket is one of the driest and poorest regions in Thailand. It is in this rural area that the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is using "*maw lum*", a local form of entertainment, to encourage safer sex practices and to discourage young women from engaging in sex work. Most people in Thailand are well aware of AIDS but not so much of the risk it poses to the heterosexual community.

The *maw lum* is performed by a professional team hired by ADRA. It combines music, dance, drama and mime.

A maw lum performance was developed to address the risks of AIDS in the rural Northeastern part of Thailand. (Photo courtesy of the SiSaket Provincial Hospital, SiSaket, Thailand)

Men, women and children will sit cross-legged on the ground for hours to watch the maw lum performances, which combine music, drama and mime. (Photo courtesy of the SiSaket Provincial Hospital, SiSaket, Thailand)

The costumes form an important part of the play since they greatly exaggerate the actors' roles. The plot of the AIDS production was dictated by ADRA but the scripts are written by the team. In the plot, two young men leave their homes in the Northeast to work in Bangkok for a few months (a common practice). They visit a local brothel, where they discuss condom use. One of the men decides to use them. The story then follows the man who decided against using condoms as he returns home with the first symptoms of AIDS, showing the mixed reactions of friends, family and his wife as he becomes sicker and eventually dies. The story also briefly focuses on the family of one of the sex workers and on how her life changes over the course of time. Some parts of the production are absolutely hilarious, but the story leaves the audience with an awareness of the seriousness of AIDS.

In order to keep the stream of information constant, ADRA follows up *maw lum* performances with school programmes, counselling for people with AIDS and condom distribution at places where villagers gather.

What makes the use of *maw lum* particularly effective is the fact that performances are in the local language (few villagers read or write Thai so written information as well as tv and radio messages largely pass them by). It also appeals to Northeastern audiences because it is completely original to their culture; entire villages turn out for the popular performances. *Details on the maw lum performances can be obtained from: Jeffery Wright, ADRA, Box 11-234, Phrakanong, Bangkok 10110, Thailand; tel. 66-2-390-0001; fax: 66-2-381-1424.*

Vanuatu (South Pacific)

With a population of 145,000 people who have no access to public television and who are dispersed over several islands, health promotion efforts in Vanuatu must use methods which bypass these communication barriers. "Wan Smol Bag", a four-member drama group, is doing this by regularly visiting the nation's islands to present productions on subjects ranging from nutrition to the environment.

The troupe's name refers to the fact that all of the props needed to produce plays fit into "one small bag". This reduces expenses and makes productions easily transportable as well as easy and quick to set up. Wan Smol Bag's plays often use visual comedy and music, which makes it easier to overcome language problems.

Performances frequently take place outside traditional theatre settings, such as outdoor spaces in villages. The plays must be action-packed to hold the audience's attention as the actors might be competing for attention with the noise of ocean waves crashing on reefs or crying children. Villagers' response has been very positive: "it's so much clearer when we see a play than when we hear a 'tok-tok' on the radio!"

One play, "Warm Night", is predominantly comic in tone. Performed mainly in areas where AIDS has not yet been really grasped as a concept, it follows the lives of three persons: a student, an expatriate working in Vanuatu and a worker on a big shipping line between Vila and Bangkok. The situations in which they find themselves are used to show people what kind of behaviour might put them at risk. The pantomime style helps avoid causing offence over sexual matters. The play ends with the three characters waiting for their HIV-test results, which provides a useful starting point for discussion: who is more likely to be HIV-positive?

Another play, "Like Any Other Lovers", focuses on creating positive attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS as well as

stimulating thought about risk behaviours. Set in the future, 1996, the play looks at the community's attitude towards someone with AIDS, examines myths about how one can catch the virus and shows how a person with HIV/AIDS can still make a contribution. The main character spends some of his final months teaching in the local primary school on his island. His girlfriend, a nurse, stays with him to the end and is in that sense a positive role model. This play is more suitable for smaller audiences in a workshop situation who are already familiar with the idea of AIDS.

The advantage of theatre in both cases is that it takes the pressure off the audience. Discussion on sensitive issues is easier when you can talk about a play character's actions, fears and doubts instead of your own.

Two planned projects involve the performance of AIDS plays at primary health care (PHC) workshops and the production of two videos (in English and Bislama). The PHC workshops will include post-play group work with role-playing and discussions so that the impact of the plays' messages can be evaluated.

The videos will feature the drama "Like Any Other Lovers". The English video will be distributed to schools while the Bislama version will be made available for use in villages.

The troupe also teaches drama to jobless youths, which has resulted in the establishment of four other drama groups in Abrym, one of Vanuatu's larger islands. *For more information contact: Peter Walker, Wan Smol Bag Theatre, P.O. Box 404, Port Vila, Vanuatu; tel. 687-678-24397.* ■

Theatre as a tool: how to develop a performance

Gill Gordon and Elizabeth Lynch

The performing arts can have a powerful impact on an audience and are therefore an especially useful tool in AIDS-related prevention and health promotion. Community theatre breaks down barriers between the audience and performers as a play shares ideas, looks at options and stimulates creative thought. The best way to achieve this is by actively involving people from your intended audience in defining the issues, developing and pre-testing the play and discussing it after each performance.

There are many ways to use drama in an HIV/AIDS prevention programme. These range from a village health worker putting on a sketch using two puppets at a clinic for mother-and-child health care (MCH) to professional actors touring a district with a full-scale theatrical performance. Dramatic techniques can empower groups by helping them explore issues and practise new skills.

Producers have a responsibility to ensure that the ideas in a play are helpful or at least not harmful. Plays should never patronize, judge or lecture the audience. Scripts should always be critically reviewed for "hidden messages" and value judgements. The impact of the programme as it develops should be evaluated. Before a play is performed, therefore, plans should be made for follow-up services and support, monitoring and evaluation. In this article, we would like to provide you with some pointers based on our experience in using drama to educate people about HIV/AIDS.

What's the problem?

Begin by finding out as much as you can about what AIDS means to different people in your community.

- Talk to *key people* who know about various aspects of the problem (e.g., bar owners, family-planning workers, healers).
- Bring up the subject in *informal conversations* with friends and acquaintances.
- Carry out *focus group discussions* to

learn how different people perceive AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and sexuality in their own lives. Find out which media are popular and accessible to the group.

- Look for *local statistics and research findings* on relevant topics such as STDs, HIV infection, condom use, marriage and sexual behaviour.

Based on this research, describe accurately the situation in your community and list opportunities for preventing HIV transmission as well as possible obstacles. What role could drama play in addressing some of the problems?

Your audience

Your audience will depend on your priorities, the issues you want to address, your resources and the interests of local people. You must decide whether you will: 1) select a specific group or reach the whole community and 2) perform the play in one community or take it on tour or film it to reach a much wider audience. For example:

- You may devise short sketches for women attending an MCH clinic, male factory workers and schoolchildren, or you may focus on an issue of nationwide relevance, such as the problem of denial and discrimination against people with AIDS, so you film the play for showings on television, at video houses and by video vans.
- It may be common for many young men and women in your region to have a series of lovers over a period of time, so you aim to reach everyone over the age of puberty in as many communities as possible.
- You may decide to work with commercial sex workers, their customers and bar owners because the women are very worried about their occupational risks, thus the play's contents should be specific to their working situation and should be shown in sex-work settings.

Developing the play

Develop the play with the active involvement of people who will be typical of your audience or who have something they want to say to the audience (e.g., people with HIV who want to share their experiences or women who want to make men aware of how they feel about sexual relationships).

Gather a group of people who have the time and interest to work together regularly over several weeks to develop the play. Also look for people with skills in acting, dance, song and script-writing. Help them learn the facts about HIV/AIDS and explore their feelings about what the issues mean in their lives. Also share your findings from the focus groups discussions and research with them.

The issues

Decide together on one or two issues which are important and could be addressed well through drama. Drama is particularly good for touching the heart as well as the mind, for placing information in the context of people's lives, for helping people discover new perspectives without feeling threatened and for demonstrating skills in communication and decision-making. Some examples:

- **Issue**: People think AIDS only affects others and if they should die in 10 years' time, it doesn't matter. A play might tell the story of a person typical of the audience who becomes infected with HIV and the effects of this on partners, children and family.
- **Issue**: Commercial sex workers find it difficult to persuade their customers to use condoms. A series of amusing skits might show different approaches to getting men to use condoms.
- **Issue**: Girls feel pressured by boys into having unsafe sex. A play might show how boys exert such pressure and ways in which girls can assertively talk about their needs and desires.

Using drama activities

After selecting the issues, drama activities and games can be used to develop situations and dialogues as a basis for a performance, which can either consist of a story about one group of characters or various skits around one theme. Such activities and games may also serve as an educational or training tool in their own right.

For example, do role-plays in pairs about the worst thing that could happen if you talk about safer sex with a partner. Repeat the plays showing the best thing that could happen. In another technique, four people can act as characters in a tv panel game (e.g. "Moralist", "Romantic", "Know all" and "Superman"). The tv "host" asks them to discuss questions such as "what are you doing personally to prevent the spread of HIV?"

Groups of five people can also be asked to make a human sculpture or "picture" which shows some aspect of community life which is relevant to the issues. The other group members are asked what they see and each person then adds a movement to their character to make a "machine" which can be used in the play. Alternatively, people with dramatic skills can teach the group a song, dance or story relevant to the play or how to make puppets or masks.

The medium

You need to think about which media are popular with your intended audience and why. What is the balance between speaking, music, dance or puppetry? Is there a narrator or joker? Are there traditional situations or characters which can be used to put across ideas about sexual health (e.g. from popular tv or radio programmes or films)?

Another important question is which media are accessible to your audience and at what time. For example, if women are not allowed to leave their homes in the evening, performances must be arranged at places where they gather during the day. Films are not useful if very few people have access to a tv. Other points to consider include the following:

- Can local people who are skilled in particular arts be incorporated into the performance?
- Will a particular medium help people talk about embarrassing or sensitive topics (e.g. puppets and masks)?
- What does the medium cost per person reached effectively?
- How many people can participate in the production?

Such factors will influence your possibilities. For example, one person can tell a story or put on a play using two puppets. Two people can put on a role-play, skit or series of skits. A more complicated production with several characters will need more people. Low-cost activities include schoolchildren putting on plays for their peers or parents or two health-care workers putting on a sketch at a clinic. Producing a performance for tours or a film will require a much higher level of resources.

Language

Your use of language must be accurate and precise to avoid confusion (for instance, so that the audience understands the difference between a person having HIV and a person having AIDS). Take care to avoid words which portray prejudice or show people with AIDS as helpless victims.

It is effective to use local speech, jokes and details about situations which an outsider would not know about. Also find out which words people use and accept for discussing sexual matters. Use words which are explicit enough to be clearly understood but not so offensive that people stop listening to the play. If you take the play to other regions, make sure the story is relevant there, adapt and translate it so that it reflects local culture and styles.

Preparing the performance

Once you have worked out the storyline and some dialogue, you must write down an outline of the performance. The actors do not need to learn a written script word for word because this may inhibit them, but they do need to know the sequence of events and how the dialogue will go. This will ensure that the ideas do not change drastically through improvisation and that the performers know what they must do and how they will work together. You may want to involve people with skills in developing dialogue or stories at this stage.

The performers must rehearse until they are confident. It is useful for them to get feedback on their performance.

Who will perform the play?

It is very powerful for an audience to see people they know performing a play. Audience members can identify easily

with people like themselves who voice dilemmas and share anxieties. When shared views are challenged or ideas are presented in a new way by people like yourself, it is harder to dismiss them.

If people have the time, confidence and interest, they can become good performers over a period of weeks. If a group does not wish to perform a play because of time or personal reasons, you could invite experienced actors to perform it, making sure that the group retains control over the contents.

The budget

The last – but certainly not least – important aspect to consider is your budget. Think about the following potential costs, depending on the type of performance you are planning:

- **Initial research**: transport, refreshments for focus groups, tape recorder, office supplies and staff time.
- **Working with the group to develop the play**: transport, room rental, refreshments, fees for professional helpers, staff time and materials for making puppets, masks or props. You can make props cheaply if you use real objects, costumes and furniture or improvise using local materials. For example, use paper mache, clay or wood to make masks or puppets, use real condoms or make a large cloth one. "Germs" to represent the viruses causing AIDS or an STD can be made from a circle of cardboard attached to a stick and coloured with different patterns.
- **The performance**: hiring a venue, lighting, publicity, transport, staff time, fees and refreshments for performers.
- **Follow-up**: this includes finding out about local resources and services, printed materials and condoms, staff time and transport.
- **Monitoring and evaluation**: transport, staff time and office supplies. ■

Gill Gordon and Elizabeth Lynch, AIDS Prevention Unit, International Planned Parenthood Federation, P.O. Box 759, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4LQ, United Kingdom.

How to do a focus group discussion

■ Prepare an introduction, a flexible list of key issues and some open questions which will encourage people to talk to each other about the topic in their own way.

■ Gather groups of 6-8 people with particular characteristics in a private place (e.g., talk with single-sex and mixed groups, people of the same and different ages, single and married people).

■ Develop rapport with the group and create a safe atmosphere where they feel safe to talk openly about sensitive issues (ensure confidentiality and facilitate discussion by encouraging people to talk about their feelings and ideas, their lives and how they think HIV could be prevented in their community). Encourage every group member to talk and to listen attentively to the others. Be prepared to answer questions at the end.

■ Record the discussions on tape or paper. The richness of the language used will help in developing the play's dialogue.

■ After the meeting and based on your records, list the most important feelings and ideas coming from the group and note dialogue which can be used later.

GLOBAL BULLETIN BOARD

Unmasking AIDS is a resource for training and group work aimed at people involved in HIV and sexuality education, including family-planning and health workers, health promoters, teachers and youth leaders. The pack comprises a 43-minute video and two illustrated guides. The *Unmasking AIDS* guide provides a synposis of the video and suggestions for discussion and participatory activities for groups. *Activities to Explore* provides additional activities which groups can use to develop drama and build on the work described in the first guide. The video costs US $35 (including postage) for developing countries and US$ 55 elsewhere. To order send a cheque drawn on a US or UK bank or an international money order to IPPF Distribution Unit, P.O. Box 759, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4LQ, United Kingdom. ■

A resource manual for AIDS educators, a new publication released by the Canadian Public Health Association, offers practical assistance on the day-to-day obstacles encountered in AIDS education. Focusing on clarification of people's values in relation to HIV/AIDS, 15 learning activities on topics ranging from 'personalizing HIV and AIDS' to 'safer sex' provide all the information needed to set up and manage successful educational sessions. The emphasis is on learner involvement in practising new skills while respecting each person's individuality and experience. For information contact: Robert Burr, Director of Communications, Canadian Public Health Association, National AIDS Clearinghouse, Suite 400, 1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa K1Z 8R1, Canada; tel. 1-613-725-3769; fax 1-613-725-9826. ■

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